



ST. PETER'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

CHOIR HANDBOOK

*O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven:
Be ever present with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises
offered by your people on earth; and grant to them even now glimpses of your beauty, and make them
worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*
(BCP Prayers and Thanksgivings 17)

WHY DO WE SING?

We sing because God made us to sing! Singing is a particularly personal form of worship (no two voices are the same)! It can be done alone or in a group, with accompaniment or *a capella*, in Medieval style or contemporary style or anything in between.

Singing appears countless times in the Bible. Most of us know that the book of Psalms was originally sung, but there are many other biblical instances of singing. (Appendix A contains a cursory glance at what the Bible has to say about singing.) We have records of songs sung by David, Moses, Miriam, Simeon, Zechariah, Deborah, Isaiah, and even Mary the mother of God, as well as our Lord Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26). After the Last Supper, Christ most likely sang Psalms 115-118, the traditional set of hymns sung by the Jewish people at the end of the Passover meal.

Worship through song is a tradition that has been passed down through church history. Gregorian chant, Renaissance polyphony, Classical and Romantic Masses, hymns, and dissonant 20th-century sacred vocal works all worship God, each using their own distinct musical characteristics. At St. Peter's, we make use of all of these styles to lead the congregation in worship. We particularly love the Anglican musical tradition, so we fill our worship services with hymns, chorally-chanted psalms, anthems, and organ music. Anthems (any piece sung by the choir in worship) are sung at the Offertory; this means that even though the congregation may not be able to join us in our song, we invite them to appreciate our efforts and together, we will offer our humble noise in praise to God. Music at communion is more contemporary in style, so as to facilitate the participation of the congregation in singing.

Singing can act as confession, lament, praise, thanksgiving, history, exhortation, prayer, and petition, and the texts of the pieces we sing are often chosen for a particular purpose, according to the church calendar, the lectionary readings, and the sermon topic. Choir members should seek to read and understand the texts of the music they are singing so that Sunday services can be a true act of worship. Sometimes this may take some translation!

EXCELLENCE

St. Peter's strives for excellence in all it does. This is especially true for music, since it is such a prominent piece of the worship service. To that end, you should give as much time, energy, and effort as you can to the success of the choir.

You **do not** have to be professionally trained to join the St. Peter's Choir; you just have to have a willing heart, a desire to make a joyful noise to the Lord, and a good work ethic. We often perform challenging pieces, but many people find that with the help of rehearsals and staff singers, they can rise up to the task. And always, we expect that our music will pass through a "curtain of grace" that allows it to be received as worship regardless of its faults.

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals are on Thursdays from 7 to 8:30 pm. During busy times of the year (Christmas and Easter), you may be asked to stay 15-20 minutes late or to attend an extra rehearsal. Rehearsals typically take place in the choir room, although the Music Director may communicate a change in location to the choir loft through e-mail or signage. Please keep chatter to a minimum during rehearsal; the Music Director loves to have fun, but he also likes to rehearse efficiently, given the large quantity of music we have to cover!

STAFF SINGERS

One or two staff singers form the backbone of each section. If you have any questions regarding notes, rhythms, or musical expression, ask a staff singer first. They can meet with you one-on-one, or they may choose to call the entire section in a few minutes early for rehearsal to work as a group. If you don't know who your section's leader is, please ask!

EMAILS

Please provide the Music Director with an e-mail address that you will check regularly. Group e-mails will be sent out, sometimes at the last minute (for a funeral, wedding, or change in repertoire), and it is important that they are received in a timely manner.

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

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SUNDAYS

Appendix B outlines a typical Sunday worship service. Your first time in the choir may be a bit intimidating; watch what others are doing and ask as many questions as you can. After a few services, you should feel fine!

PROCESSING

The choir participates in the procession at the beginning of each service. Vergers will direct the choir to its position at the back of the nave and send pairs of singers down the aisle at a prescribed speed. Each pair should maintain at least three pews between themselves and the pair ahead of them, walking slowly and adjusting speed depending on their predecessor's speed. This keeps the procession looking orderly, rather than bunching up at the end of the aisle. If you feel that you cannot process for any reason, you may be seated in the choir loft prior to the prelude.

HYMNS

Typically, the choir will sing melody on the first and last verses of a hymn and harmony on the inner verses. Hymns will generally not be rehearsed before the service, but hymn numbers will be given to the choir mid-week so that they can familiarize themselves with the melodies, harmonies, and texts. Hymns are often sung during procession, so it's important that the choir is confident in singing them. Occasionally the Music Director will ask for a Descant to be sung on the last verse of a hymn; this means that the soprano section (and able altos) will sing a separate melody above the primary melody, which is sung by the other sections and the congregation.

ATTIRE

VESTMENTS

You will be given a **Cassock** (long-sleeved black robe) and a **Cotta** (white overlay) before your first Sunday in the choir. Cassocks should be fully buttoned (to the neck) whenever the choir is seen by the congregation. On Good Friday only, the Cotta is omitted.

SHOES

Black closed-toed, quiet shoes should be worn. Our aisle is made of wood, and any excessive stomping noises can be distracting to worshippers. There is a shoe caddy in the Choir Room if you would like to keep a pair of "choir shoes" at the church.

JEWELRY

No large or attention-grabbing headbands or jewelry should be worn; we're striving for a unified sound, and we should look like a unified group!

FRAGRANCE

Consider cutting back on cologne or perfume on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings. Your fellow choir members might have sensitivities or allergies, and breathing clearly is crucial for singing!

ARRIVAL TIMES

8:15 am (service at 9)

At the 9 am service, we will most often rehearse upstairs in the choir loft starting at 8:15. This means that you should plan to arrive around 8 so that you can park your car, put on your robe, grab your music, and make it upstairs by 8:15!

10:45 am (service at 11:15)

At the 11:15 service, the rehearsal will take place in the choir room at 10:45. You are welcome to join the first-servicers earlier for food and fellowship!

SNACKS

Snacks are generously donated by choir members in rotation, based upon a sign-up sheet that will be circulated at the beginning of each semester. This time of eating and fellowship is essential to choir bonding and helps those singing in both services to keep energy high. If you like to eat food, you should also sign up to bring it!

STEWARDSHIP OF ROBES, FOLDERS, AND MUSIC

Robes

Once your vestments are given to you, they are your responsibility! You will have a labeled hanger in the Choir Room, where your vestments should be hung neatly. Remember people can see into this room quite easily, and it is used for other things during the week; tidiness is very much appreciated. You may want to consider removing your Cotta in between services if you want to drink coffee or eat something – it's easier than removing stains! Should your robes become stained with makeup, wine, or coffee, they can be washed very easily at home. You may also want to take them home regularly (especially after busy weeks like Holy Week) to wash and press them.

Folders

You will be assigned a folder, which will be filled with music by our wonderful choir librarian and kept in your own personal cubby. Your robe, cubby, folder, and music will all have your particular choir member number on them. It's important to always make sure you've picked up the correct folder, as each person writes their own markings on their music. They all look alike from the outside, but the insides can be quite different!

Music

Please only use pencil to mark your music. You may take your music home to practice with it, but make sure that you have received all new music as soon as you arrive at rehearsal, as the folders are filled with new music during the week. Once a piece is performed, you may place it on the music return shelf next to the shoe caddy in the Choir Room.

ATTENDANCE AND TIMELINESS

If you are new to the choir, please take a few weeks to get acclimated and prayerfully consider whether the choir is the best ministry for you. Once you have decided to join the choir, you are expected to come **regularly** to rehearsals on Thursday nights and services on Sunday morning. If you are able to sing for both services, please do so. If, however, you can only commit to one service, please be a regular attender of that particular service.

If you know in advance that you will be out of town on a particular Thursday or Sunday, you should put your name in the **Sign-Out Book** as soon as possible. The Music Director uses this information to plan pieces and to anticipate the size and ability of the group he will have at any given service. The Sign-Out Book is located in the Choir Room, next to the Music Director's office door. If something comes up suddenly and you can't use the Sign-Out Book, you should call or e-mail the Music Director as soon as possible.

Many people want to know if they can still sing with the choir after missing a rehearsal. If you have rehearsed the piece at least twice before and feel confident with the notes and expressive aspects, you may sing on Sunday. If you have missed the most recent rehearsal, it's important that you are on time so that you can rehearse before the service (the Director may choose to change articulations, dynamics, or breaths at the last moment!).

It is important to be **on time** for both rehearsals and services! In order for the choir to keep performing ambitious (and fun!) repertoire, we need all the rehearsal time we can get. On Sunday mornings, we will rehearse promptly at 8:15 so that we can be out of the nave by the time people start arriving for worship (although we sound beautiful, we don't want them to have to listen to the same piece twice).

THE CHURCH CALENDAR

The liturgical church calendar revolves around two important dates: **Christmas and Easter**. The seasons leading up to and including these celebrations are particularly busy for the choir. **Lessons and Carols** is a big, joyful celebration of the story of redemption and the birth of Christ, which features many choral anthems; we start preparing months in advance! During **Holy Week**, the choir sings special anthems for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. You should notify the Music Director as soon as possible if you have a conflict with one of these services, but make every effort to come. These are some of the most life-giving and revitalizing services of the whole year, and the choir plays an unparalleled role in leading God's people in worship!

During the summer, the choir takes time off to have some rest and to allow the congregation to miss us (this way we never get taken for granted!). Soloists and small groups fill in during the months of June and July. If you would like to perform during this time, please contact the Music Director with a suggestion.

The choir typically has a Christmas Party in December and an End of Year Party in May or June. Any choir members can suggest or offer a location, and food is potluck.

APPENDIX A – BIBLICAL INSPIRATION FOR SINGING

David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy. 1 Chronicles 15:16

Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. 2 Chronicles 29:27

For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. Nehemiah 12:46

I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me. Psalm 13:6

You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever. Psalm 30:11-12

Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise Him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. Psalm 33:1-3

But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. Psalm 59: 16

Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Psalm 84: 4

Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "All my springs of joy are in you." Psalm 87:7

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! Psalm 95:1-2

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! . . . Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of the melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. Psalm 98:1, 4-9

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Psalm 100: 1-2

The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has given me victory.
Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly.
The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things! Psalm 118:14-15

Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. Psalm 126:6

For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How can we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land? Psalm 137:4

My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit. Isaiah 65:14

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Matthew 26:26-30

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, and the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened. Acts 16:25-6

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:18-20

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to sing,
"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!" Revelation 4:8

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed." Revelation 15: 2-4

APPENDIX B – SUNDAY SERVICE OUTLINE

Prelude – **choir lines up in the narthex**

The Entrance Rite

Entrance Hymn – **choir processes down center aisle in pairs (as directed by verger), returns to narthex via side aisles, takes stairs to choir loft**

Collect for Purity

Opening Acclamation

Gloria – **choir leads congregation in Glory to God in the Highest**

Collect of the Day

The Liturgy of the Word

The First Lesson

Psalm – **choir stands to sing the psalm**

The New Testament Lesson

Sequence Hymn (Procession of the Gospel) – **choir stands to lead congregation**

The Gospel

Procession of the Gospel

The Sermon – **choir sits**

Creed

Prayer of the People

Confession

Absolution

The Peace

Announcements – **choir prepares to sing anthem (make sure music is ready)**

The Holy Communion

At the Offertory – **choir sings anthem**

Presentation Hymn – **choir remains standing**

The Great Thanksgiving

Sanctus – **choir leads congregation in Holy, Holy, Holy**

Communion – **choir may receive communion downstairs with the rest of the congregation or may stay and be communicated in the choir loft; choir sings along with communion music**

Postcommunion Prayer

Blessing

Closing Hymn – **choir stands to lead congregation in hymn**

Dismissal

Postlude – **please maintain silence and calm during the postlude, as the organist may be distracted by excessive talking or movement; you may leave immediately or stay quietly; applause is allowed!**